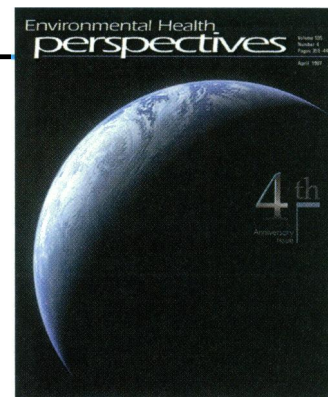


*No man is an island, entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*

*John Donne (1572–1631)
Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, 1624*



Editorial

Anniversaries and Attitudes

This month, April, is the fourth anniversary of the inception of the revised *Environmental Health Perspectives*. Each anniversary issue for the last four years has featured a picture of our planet to remind us of what John Donne knew intellectually and instinctively—that “no man is an island.” Three hundred and seventy-three years later, the proof of Donne’s words could not be more evident than from the window of a space craft and the lessons of environmental disasters.

Recent developments suggest that we may be on the threshold of significant changes in the attitudes of several major industries toward problems in environmental health. These changes in industrial attitudes will shape our world well into the next century. Two major industries that have traditionally lacked credibility in areas of health and the environment are the chemical and the tobacco industries. Recently, however, it seems that major changes are afoot. First, the chemical industry is setting up a research program for the investigation of allegations that some of their chemicals might be toxic to humans, and second, the tobacco industry might have admitted that tobacco may be toxic and addictive. What extraordinary changes and what repercussions may be around the corner. Although some might question the motives of industry, the fact remains that new accountability and attendance to the global effects of products such as chemicals and tobacco may have beneficial consequences for all.

For example, changes have occurred within the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA) that may lead to major changes in the way the industry interfaces with the environment and people. Under the aegis of the CMA, the chemical industry is setting up a research program for the investigation of the potentially toxic effects of certain chemicals to humans. In a recent editorial (1) published in *Chemical and Engineering News*, John Akitt, the executive vice president of Exxon Chemical Company and chairman of the CMA’s Committee on Health and Environmental Health Effects, announced a new initiative for the CMA in which the industry, in a partnership with the Chemical Industry Institute of Toxicology (CIIT), would pursue a line of research into the “basic mechanisms by which chemicals react with the human body.” The CIIT’s reputation for excellence in scientific research lends credibility to the project. In addition, the program will seek to publish its results in peer reviewed journals without regard to adverse effects on the chemical industry. An advisory panel is to be established consisting of academic, government, and nonindustry scientists to oversee and assess progress of the initiative. This program may have far-reaching consequences both for the industry and for citizens affected by industrial pollution. Consistent with this commendable initiative, the CMA and other industry groups are working hard with all stakeholders to bring good science to the table in determining whether or not endocrine disruptors contribute to human disease. In addition, CMA-affiliated industries are collaborating with the NIEHS, the EPA, the FDA, and the pharmaceutical industry to investigate the usefulness of transgenic animals models for evaluation of carcinogens.

Consider what can happen when a different attitude is maintained. Currently, 22 states are seeking an estimated \$30 billion in damages from the tobacco industry to pay for health expenses for tobacco-related illnesses. Florida alone claims \$1 billion for tobacco-

related Medicare spending and has won the right to pursue much higher awards if the tobacco companies are found to have operated as racketeers under a state conspiracy law. A crack has developed in the “tobacco wall” and, with the recent awarding of \$750,000 in the first successful verdict against any tobacco company, the crack has widened. In addition, the Liggett Group has broken ranks with its fellows and offered evidence that the tobacco industry has known for many years about the carcinogenic and addictive properties of tobacco. The industry is in major trouble.

Also, consider what will happen when the victims of second-hand smoke get going. On June 2, 1997, the trial begins in a class-action lawsuit in which 60,000 flight attendants are seeking damages for illnesses related to long-term exposure to second-hand smoke. We have no doubts that soon the offspring of smoking mothers exposed *in utero* will also get involved and sue for developmentally related deficiencies. The attitudinal change of the Liggett Group was brought about by financial considerations but, nevertheless, the consequences are far reaching. What is doubtful today may be fact tomorrow, but only attitudinal changes can make it so.

A major catalyst for attitudinal change is the published word. Journals such as *EHP* have a major role to play in shaping the future of environmental health. However, just as the world of environmental health is changing, so must we as a journal evolve to keep up. We have begun to publish *EHP* and its Supplements on the internet. The on-line version of the journal offers numerous advantages over its paper form. For one, the internet version will be several weeks ahead of the paper version. Secondly, as a forum for the discussion of environmental issues, the internet is outstanding. We might actually be able to debate the issues without leaving our desks. We will be able to illustrate and clarify difficult concepts in a manner that is impossible when confined to paper. Thirdly, the international standing of our journal will be enhanced because the internet is international. How wonderful it would be if readers in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, could actively discuss issues with readers in Beijing, China, using *EHP* as their forum. This possibility is just around the corner. The future for the journal looks wonderfully exciting and we hope that you our readers will continue to support *EHP* and continue to share our enthusiasm for many years to come. In the world of environmental science where attitudes are not fixed and the internet is a reality, no man could ever be an island.

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REFERENCES

1. Akitt JE. 'A natural' for industry. *Chem Eng News* 75(5):5 (1997).